

IX

"A Martyr at the Sasanid Court under Vahran II: Candida," by Sebastian Brock, from *Analecta Bollandiana* XCVI (Brussels, 1978).

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A MARTYR AT THE SASANID COURT UNDER VAHRAN II: CANDIDA

In his inscription on the « Ka'ba of Zoroaster », put up in the reign of Vahran II (276-93), the Magian official Kartir tells how « the doctrines of Ahriman and the demons », enumerated as those of the Jews, Shamans, Brahmins, « Nazareans », Christians and others, † were annihilated from the Sasanian empire ¹. Among the victims of Kartir's religious zeal was Mani (died 276) and, according to the *Chronicle of Seert*, a number of Christians ². The Chronicle records how Vahran was originally favourable to Christianity, but later on, when Manicheans began masquerading as Christians, « the Magians persecuted the Christians without distinction. He (Vahran) killed Qndyr' his wife of Roman origin because she was a Christian » ³. It goes on to list other victims : « the blessed Qariba son of Anania » was put to death, and Papa (bishop of Seleucia-Ktesiphon) suffered much for his faith.

Of Qariba nothing more is known, but Qndyr' is to be identified as Candida, whose life survives in a sixth-century manuscript, British Library Add.12142, ff. 104^a-107^b (the ending is unfortunately lost). A very brief summary of the life was given by F. Nau in his « Résumé de monographies syriaques, X. Martyre de Qandida »

¹ M.-L. CHAUMONT, *L'inscription de Kartir à la « Ka'abah de Zoroastre », in Journal Asiatique*, t. 248 (1960), p. 339-80 (esp. p. 347). On the identity of the « Nazareans » and « Christians », see my *Some Aspects of Greek Words in Syriac*, in *Abhandlungen Akad. Wiss. Göttingen*, t. 96 (1975), p. 91-5, where I suggest that the former represent the native Christians (*naṣṣraye* in Syriac), and the latter the deported Christians of Greek origin (*kresṣṭyane* in Syriac).

² § 9 (*Patr. Or.*, t. 4, p. 238). The author of the Chronicle has recently been identified by P. NAUTIN as Isho'dnaḥ, in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, t. 186 (1974), p. 113-26 (cp P. DEVOS in *Anal. Boll.* t. 93, 1975, p. 166, note 1), but compare J. M. FIEY, *Isho'dnaḥ et la « Chronique de Seert »*, in *Parole de l'Orient*, t. 6 (*Mélanges F. Graffin*).

³ ...li'tiqdādhā al-naṣṣrānīya.

in the *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* 10 (1915/7), pp. 23-4¹, but otherwise the work has received little or no attention². As I shall attempt to show, the account contains elements which inspire confidence in the basic historicity of the martyrdom³, even though there are naturally a number of largely fictional embellishments, such as the dialogue between Candida and the King, and maybe some of the details of the tortures.

The Martyrdom opens by saying that it took place during « the first persecution that occurred in the country of the Persians ... in the days of WRTRN, grandfather of Shapur, king of kings of Persia ». WRTRN represents an archaic spelling of Varhran (*Werethraghna)⁴, and the *Chronicle of Seert* identifies him as Vahrán II. This is no doubt correct⁵, although the statement that Vahrán was Shapur's grandfather is perplexing: Vahrán II's father, Vahrán I, was great-uncle of Shapur II, and it was for this reason, presumably, that Wright (who did not yet know the *Chronicle of Seert*) identified the WRTRN of our martyrdom with Vahrán I⁶.

Two possible explanations of the alleged relationship present themselves:

(1) The author of the martyrdom (who was probably working in the fifth century) knew nothing of the real genealogy of the Sasanid dynasty, and simply calls Vahrán (II) « grandfather » of Shapur (II) because he knew him to be a fairly recent predecessor of the famous Shapur.

(2) « Grandfather » is a corruption of, or mistake for, « great-grandfather », and the author of the martyrdom was already under the

¹ Nau already made the identification with Qndyr'.

² Cp J. M. FIEY, *Jalons pour une histoire de l'Église en Iraq* (CSCO 310; 1970), p. 54-5.

³ In principle accepted by CHAUMONT, *Les Sassanides et la christianisation de l'empire iranien au III^e siècle de notre ère*, in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, t. 165 (1964), p. 196 (on the basis of the entry in the *Chronicle of Seert*).

⁴ F. JUSTI, *Iranisches Namenbuch* (Marburg, 1895), p. 361; cp below, p. 171.

⁵ According to Mas'ûdî (ed. BARBIER DE MEYNARD) II, p. 168 Vahrán was at first given to a dissipated life; SPRENGLING argues that there could be some truth in this tradition (*Third Century Iran: Sapor and Kartir* [Chicago, 1953], p. 42).

⁶ *Catalogue*, p. 1093. Nau corrects this on the basis of the *Chronicle of Seert* (art. cit., p. 23 note 2, where « Bahram III » is no doubt a printing error for « Bahram II »).

misapprehension, common in later writers ¹, that Narseh (293-302) was a brother of Vahran III (293) and son of Vahran II ²; since Narseh was the grandfather of Shapur II, this would make Vahran II into his great-grandfather ³.

Candida « belonged to those deported from Roman territory » (§ 2), in other words she, or perhaps her parents, were among those taken captive by Shapur I and settled in various new foundations within the Persian empire. It is known that these communities played an important role in the history of the Christian Church in Persia ⁴, and later they produced other martyrs, such as Pusai, the king's « chief craftsman » at Karka d-Ladan ⁵. In some places a separate Greek-speaking hierarchy survived into the early fifth century, to give rise to scandal in the eyes of Marutha at the synod of Seleucia-Ktesiphon in 410 ⁶.

Candida's beauty attracts her to the king, who gives orders that « she enter his bedchamber » (§ 2). Such was his love for her that she was given the title of « king's wife » (§ 3), an event that stirred up against her the envy and jealousy of the king's other wives and eventually led to her downfall. The king, in his endeavours to win her away from Christianity, goes so far as to promise to make her chief queen in the realm (§ 5).

Something of the complexity of the hierarchy of the royal ladies at the Sasanid court can be learnt from Shapur I's trilingual inscription on the « Ka'ba of Zoroaster » at Naqsh-e Rostam. ⁷ This document, which only dates less than two decades before Vahran II's accession, lists a number of high-ranking ladies who were the beneficiaries of sacrifices. Their titles, in descending order of importance, are *bānbišnān-bānbišn* « queen of queens », *šahr-bānbišn* « queen of the

¹ E.g. Ṭabarī (ed. DE GOEJE) I. ii, p. 835; Ya'qūbī (ed. HOUTSMA) I, p. 182.; Mas'ūdī (ed. BARBIER DE MEYNARD) II, p. 174; Mirkhond (ET ed. ARBUTHNOT) I.ii, p. 339. Note that in Agathias (ed. KEYDELL) IV.24 no relationship to his predecessors is given for Narseh.

² In fact brother of Vahran I and son of Shapur I.

³ So specifically Ṭabarī (ed. DE GOEJE) I.ii, p. 836.

⁴ Cp FIEY, *Jalons...*, p. 56-62, and CHAUMONT, *Les Sassanides et la christianisation...*

⁵ BHO 993, BEDJAN, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* (= AMS) II, p. 208-10.

⁶ Cp J. B. CHABOT, *Synodicon Orientale* (Paris, 1902), p. 271-2 (canon 21).

⁷ See, most conveniently, A. MARICQ, *Res Gestae divi Saporis*, in *Syria*, t. 35 (1958), p. 295-360.

realm», *bānbišn* «queen», and *bānīk* «lady»¹. Candida's promised title of «chief queen of the realm» looks as if it reflects *šahr-bānbišn* of the inscription, and it is intriguing to find that the lady who holds this title there is given no ancestry; in other words, she is of non-Iranian origin, and Chaumont has suggested, on the basis of her name (Xoranzem), that she may be a Georgian or an Armenian. Thus Vahrān's promise to Candida has a good precedent at the court of Šapur I. If the identification of «chief queen of the realm» as *šahr-bānbišn* is correct, then «king's wife» will presumably correspond to *bānbišn*.

It is just conceivable that Candida is the person commemorated on 7th Šbaṭ (February) in the Syriac martyrology in Add. 12150 dated AD 411², even though that Candida³ features among the occidental martyrs and not in the appendix of oriental ones: Add. 12142 contains, besides the martyrdom of Candida, two other martyrdoms, Cyprianus, Justa and Theoctistus (cp. *BHG* 454-6) and Pantaleon, Hermolaus and companions (cp. *BHG* 2173), both connected with Nicomedia, which is often held to be the place of origin of the Syriac martyrology. Possibly the inclusion of Candida amongst Nicomedia martyrs in Add. 12142 might suggest that her family had some connections with that town, and this in turn might have led to the insertion of her name in the martyrology. On the other hand, it should be noted that none of the Nicomedia martyrs of Add. 12142 otherwise feature in the martyrology in Add. 12150.

There is a possible hint in the text itself that the readership of the martyrdom was envisaged as being, anyhow partly, outside the Persian empire: the opening statement that the martyrdom took place «in the country of the Persians» is so general that it would seem to imply an external audience, rather than one belonging to the Persian empire, for whom a precise localization would have been more likely. Since the martyrdom took place at the king's residence, this will have been Seleucia-Ktesiphon if the season was winter, or

¹ See especially M. L. CHAUMONT, *A propos de quelques personnages féminins figurant dans l'inscription trilingue de Šāhpur I à la «Ka'ba de Zoroastre»*, in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, t. 22 (1963), p. 194-9; also E. BENVENISTE, *Titres et noms propres en iranien ancien* (Paris, 1966), p. 27-50.

² *Acta Sanctorum*, Novembris II.1 (1894), p. liii, and B. MARIANI, *Breviarium Syriacum* (Rome, 1956), p. 30.

³ Cp J. M. SAUGET in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, t. 3 (1963), col. 738 for details concerning the great uncertainty of her identity (note, for example, the presence of a Candidus on 7 January and on 12 February).

Beit Lapaṭ if it was summer ; and if our Candida is to be identified with the Candida of the martyrology of 411 and the date, 7th Šbaṭ, that of her death, then the locality will have been Seleucia-Ktesiphon.

Literary affinities and date of composition

If one takes the opening passage at its face value, the implication is that the author of the martyrdom was writing in the reign of Shapur II (died 379), or at any rate before the accession of Shapur III (383-8). The phraseology used would, however, also be quite suitable for a fifth century author for whom Shapur II represented the only important Shapur of the previous century. There would seem to be one factor which might support a comparatively early date of composition : the archaic spelling of Vahran's name as WRTRN (against the later norm of WRHRN) could point to a date earlier than the Abgar cycle of martyrdoms¹ under Yezdgerd I and Vahran V. On the other hand, there are some features in common with the group of Shapur II martyrdoms that Wiessner calls the B-Zyklus², which certainly belongs to the fifth century. Here the following observations, of a more general nature, seem worth making.

In phraseology and choice of motifs the martyrdom of Candida actually stands somewhat apart from the other early Sasanid martyr literature : the small number of parallels³ that I have found are listed in the footnotes to the translation ; of these, perhaps the most important is the phrase « people of God » as a designation for the local Christian community : this occurs three times in the Martyrdom of Simeon bar Šabba'e (recension B) and twice in the martyrdom of Peroz (under Vahran V).⁴

Features that distinguish the martyrdom of Candida from other Sasanid martyrdoms⁵ include such things as the choice of epithets

¹ See P. DEVOS, *Abgar, hagiographe perse méconnu (début du V^e siècle)*, in *Anal. Boll.*, t. 83 (1965), p. 303-28. WRTRN appears as the name of a renegade priest in AMS II, p. 287-8 (Martyrs of Beth Slokh under Shapur II).

² G. WIESSNER, *Untersuchungen zur syrischen Literaturgeschichte, I. Zur Märtyrerüberlieferung aus der Christenverfolgung Schapurs II* (= *Abhandlungen Akad. Wiss. Göttingen*, phil.-hist. Kl. III. 67, 1967). This cycle includes Simeon (recension B), Pusai, Martha and the Great Slaughter (BHO 1119, 993, 698, 704).

³ There are certainly no direct borrowings that I have been able to discover.

⁴ See p. 180, footnote 4.

⁵ And, for that matter, the other martyr literature that might be thought to serve as a possible literary model, namely Eusebius' *Palestinian martyrs* and the Edessene martyrdoms.

for the heroine. For these we have the following : 𐭪𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 3, 6, 12, 13(bis) ; 𐭪𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 𐭪𐭥𐭥𐭥 Title, 11 ; 𐭪𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 𐭪𐭥𐭥𐭥¹ ; 𐭪𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 4 ; 𐭪𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 𐭪𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 2 ; 𐭪𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 11 ; 𐭪𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥 15.

Tubana, with or without the name¹, is common in the Persian martyr literature, alongside *qaddiṣa* and *naṣṣiḥa* (both absent from *Candida*) ; it is not, however, used of any of the woman martyrs (*Tarbo*, *Thekla*², and later *Anahid*) except *Martha*³. The other epithets in our martyrdom have no precise parallels : « believing/faithful » is used of *Pusai* (*Martha's* father) once in the phrase *mhaymna da-šrara Pusai* (*AMS* II, p. 210), but nowhere else, to my knowledge. « Maidservant of Christ » finds its closest parallel again in the martyrdom of *Martha* (*AMS* II, p. 235)⁴, « maidservants of God », while « disciple of Christ » does not appear to occur elsewhere in this literature.⁵

Finally, it may be noted that the loan word *qullara* (κολλάριον) is not to be found in any of the literature about the martyrs under *Shapur II*, *Yezdgerd I* or *Vahrán V*.

The martyrdom of *Candida*, then, has no very obvious ties with the *Shapur* or later martyr literature. The closest links — and these are mostly rather tenuous — are with *Wiessner's B-Zyklus*, that is to say, *Simeon* recension B, *Pusai*, *Martha* and the *Great Slaughter*. This group has close links with the summer royal residence built by *Shapur II*, *Karka d-Ladan*, and has a strong interest in the West (*Pusai* and *Martha* belong to deported families)⁶ ; it is pretty certainly a product of the fifth century (*Martha*⁷ gives 427 as a *terminus post quem*). It is perhaps best to see the martyrdom of *Candida* as a product of approximately the same time, though based on much older — and probably reliable — traditions.

¹ If the name is present, the adjective normally comes first ; for the reverse order (as in *Candida* 11), cp *Simeon* B, col. 799 ; *Barba'shmin*, *AMS* II, p. 297 ; *Aqqebshma*, *AMS* II, p. 374 (and four times) ; *Miles*, *AMS* II, p. 263 etc (here the norm) ; *Narsai*, *AMS* IV, p. 170, 172, 173 ; etc.

² Normally *naṣṣiḥta* or *qaddiṣta* are used for these.

³ « Blessed *Martha* » : *AMS* II, p. 233, 236-7, 240 (the reverse order does not occur) ; « blessed one » : p. 234.

⁴ Compare the male counterpart, « servant(s) of God », in *Pusai* (*AMS* II, p. 214-5), *Great Slaughter* (*AMS* II, p. 244), and *Aqqebshma* (*AMS* II, p. 396).

⁵ The single epithet used of the king (*'awwala*, § 10) is likewise poorly attested in the Persian martyr literature (*Thekla*, *AMS* II, p. 310 ; *Mihrshabur*, *AMS* II, p. 537 ; *Saba*, *AMS* IV, p. 227, 247), which much prefers *raṣṣi'a*.

⁶ Cp my review of *WIESSNER's* book, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns. t. 19 (1968), p. 305.

⁷ *AMS* II, p. 240-1.

[illegible]

¹ *Ms add. punct.*

² Ms *undek.*

³ Ms , h. i. v.

⁴ Ms ~~in.~~

TRANSLATION

The martyrdom of the blessed Candida who was taken captive from Roman territory and came to Persia where she became the wife of the King of kings Vartran along with the other women her companions.

1. In the first persecution that took place in the country of the Persians for the sake of the teaching of Jesus Christ, in the days of Vartran, grandfather of Shapur, King of kings of Persia,¹ this blessed Candida, who received her crown by the sword and was raised to the place of the angels, truly renounced shame in (her) love for Jesus Christ of Nazareth and in her love for the cross of her Lord in the midst of varied and harsh tortures, — so much so that even her executioners were amazed how many torments she endured.

2. This Candida belonged to those deported from Roman territory ; she had been taken captive for (or by) the Persian king, and because of her astonishing beauty the king, on seeing her, became enamoured of her and gave orders that she should enter his bed-chamber ; and he took her as a wife. His love for her exceeded his love for all his other wives, so that they became jealous of the believing Candida, but because of the king's love for her they were afraid of her.

3. The blessed girl held on to her faith because she had been brought up by her parents as a Christian, and so she preserved her modesty and her faith intact. Even when she had the title of « king's wife »² she demonstrated her true faith in God all the more, and she used to preach her Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ, openly to her companions and maids.

4. It was then that a pretext for her enemies was found, and they plotted to lay an accusation against her on the grounds of her faith, — for all her companions conformed to the king's will³ and religion. And because they could find nothing else against her, apart from the pretext of her faith in God, they found an opening against her (in this), and spoke against her to the king, telling him : « The one whom you love more than all the rest of us does not conform to your way of thinking but serves her own god and invokes him ». Her companions accused her with these words, and when the king learnt this, he gave orders that she should enter his bed-chamber. Because of his love for her, he asked the believing girl in a wheedling way : « What is your religion ? »

5. She told him : « I learnt the truth and the faith from my parents ; for I am a Christian, and I serve my Lord Jesus Christ, and I confess God his Father⁴. I have nothing else beside his holy name ». The

¹ See introduction.

² See introduction.

³ « king's will » : a commonplace of the Shapur martyrdoms.

⁴ For the omission of any reference to the Holy Spirit, compare the martyrdom of Tafaq, under Yezdgerd I (*BHO* 1139 ; *AMS* IV, p. 182.)

king said to her in answer : « You see how I love you above all my other wives, and you have honour in my kingdom, be obedient to me and abandon your religion in favour of mine ; worship the Sun and the Fire, and honour the Water ¹, so that my love for you may increase and I shall add to the honour you receive and make you chief queen in my realm » ².

6. The blessed girl, because of the pure soul that she had and the loves he had imprinted in it for Jesus (her) God, courageously and with joy told him : « Keep your honours, and give your position of authority to your wives who conform to your religion ; for I believe in the true God, and I will not abandon Jesus Christ, or forsake his religion. Nor will I worship the sun or serve the fire whose livelihood consists in bits of wood ³, and which becomes ashes, nor will I honour water which is provided by God for man's ease. I will not do your will in this, because the God whom I serve is the God of gods and Lord of lords who made heaven and earth and everything that is in them. In this I shall not be led astray, for all things created are guided by his decree».

7. Because the king's love for Candida was so great, he was patient at her words, and kept on asking her many times in case she might conform to his will. The more he used blandishments on her, the greater courage did she acquire, astonishing the king with the living words of the scriptures.

8. When he saw that all his blandishments were unsuccessful and that he could not turn her from her faith (in this way), he turned to terrible threats against her, hoping that she might abandon her firm position (or the truth), and swore by his gods that if she did not do his will he would destroy her in a horrible way.

9. On hearing these words from the king, she put on against him the armour of the strength of Christ and told the king : « Just as your blandishments were unable to bring me down from the truth of my faith, neither will your threats lessen my intent. Do with me whatever you like ; don't hold back, for I believe in my Lord Jesus Christ ; he will give me endurance against all your threats, and bring me to the kingdom of heaven. »

¹ See WIESSNER, *op. cit.*, p. 205, for the various combinations of the elements to be found in the Shapur martyrdoms. For « Sun, Fire and Water » he lists AMS II, p. 41 (Zebina and companions), and AMS II, p. 519, 522 (*History of Karka d-Bet Srok*) ; cp also Barba'shmin (BHO 135 ; AMS II, p. 302-3).

² See introduction.

³ Cp Abda (BHO 6-7 ; AMS IV, p. 252 ; under Yezdgerd I) : (Abda speaks) « Fire is not the daughter of god, but merely something which ministers to both kings and men of low estate, to rich and poor and beggars alike ; it is brought to birth by them using dry bits of wood, because God has given it for our use ! In the Armenian version (*Vark' ew Vkeyabanutiwnk' srboc'*, (Venice, 1874), t. I, p. 1-5) Abda calls Zoroastrians « ash-worshippers. »

10. Then the wicked man gave orders that she be put in irons, and he had her hands and feet put in fetters ; a collar ¹ was put round her neck, and he gave orders that she should be given just enough bread and water to keep her alive, ² in case she might be frightened and do the king's will. Each day the king asked about her, to see if her state of mind had been weakened so that she would perform the king's will. He learnt, however, that she was increasing all the more in her service of Christ and in the firmness of her faith, with the result that she was not even eating the food that was sent to her, but was serving (God) in prison in prayer and fasting.

11. When the king heard this, he gave orders that she should enter his presence in irons, and when the blessed Candida stood before him he said to her : « Aren't you ashamed to prefer irons to gold, to seek ill-treatment in place of luxury, and to desire prison rather than the palace ? ». But the handmaid of Christ told the king in a loud voice : ³ « These irons that you see me in are more desirable than a necklace of your pearls, because I have been thrown into them for the sake of Christ. Ill-treatment because of (my) love for him is preferable to me than (all) your luxuries, and prison for his name's sake is much better than your palace. »

12. With these words she enflamed the king's anger. He gave orders that she be stretched out. They removed the irons and stripped the clothes from her body, and stood her stretched out naked in front of him, while four men flayed her. When they had struck her so many times that her blood ran, the king gave orders that she be put in the collar and taken around the city in chains, in case she might feel shame over the disgrace of her nakedness. When they had brought the blessed girl out into the street, the people of God ⁴ gathered beside her and [] her because she had such great courage, confessing Jesus Christ her Lord on her lips. When they had taken her around the city during the whole day, her courage increased all the more.

13. The king then ordered (one of) her breasts to be cut off and placed in her hand. When they did this to her and made her go round the city streets, the blessed girl still gave thanks and praise to her Lord. The king next ordered her to enter into his presence, holding her breast in the palm of her hand. When he saw her he said : « Aren't you ashamed at all this ? Give in to me and I will give orders for you to be healed, and you shall have your (old) position of honour ». But the blessed girl told him : « You have no greater honour than this to give me, for you have already honoured me with two different

¹ κολλάριον.

² A common motif in the Shapur martyrdoms.

³ The « loud voice » is a commonplace in the Shapur martyr literature, and is based ultimately on IV *Macc.* 6 : 16.

⁴ The phrase occurs in Simeon B (*Patr. Syr.* t. II, cols 802, 846, 882) and Peroz (*AMS* IV, p. 254, 255). Cp also Aphrahat, *Dem.* 5.1.

honours : first you have stripped me naked and flayed me, and secondly you have given me this gift from my own body into the palm of my hand ».

14. The king said to her : « If you rejoice in these gifts, I will give you another ». At which he gave orders that her other breast be cut off and placed in the palm of her other hand, after which she was to be taken round the city.

15. When they had done this to her, and were taking her round the streets in the collar and chains, the whole city gathered to see this wonder, and a great gasp took hold of them as they went around the city with her in lamentation and tears. But the face of this disciple of Christ was radiant with joy, and her mouth was full of laughter and praise. She said with a loud voice : « I am going to (my) wedding feast [] sing for me with songs of thanksgiving [] and with hymns [] to-day, but in the world which does not pass away I have been betrothed¹. Cease your lamentations and tears for me lest... »²

Oxford, The Oriental Institute

¹ The idea of betrothal to Christ is regularly found in the martyrdoms involving women : e.g. Martha (*AMS* II, p. 236), Tarbo (*BHO* 1149 ; *AMS* II, p. 257).

² I take the opportunity to thank R. PP. P. Devos and M. van Esbroeck for a number of most valuable comments and criticisms.